Using databases basics

Using specialist databases subscribed to by the university gives you access to a wealth of academic material. Here are some tips on using the databases. Whether you're using Scopus, Web of Science, or a ProQuest database, or another search tool, you will find things common to them all.

When you run a search, the first thing you'll notice is that it will bring back a much smaller number of results than a Google search, which will bring up millions for this particular search. This is because it will just show results which are high quality scholarly articles, rather than anything anyone has put on the web.

These articles are published in journals where academics like your lecturers write up their research. They're written by academics from universities and public institutions from all over the world.

Unlike Google, you can alter the order of the results. [On the right of the screen the **Sort by** dropdown is selected] You can order by relevance to your search terms by date, so you can see the most recent articles at the top, or by the most cited articles, which are those used the most by academics. Viewing the abstract or summary of the article, will give an overview of what it contains [on screen the **Show more** is selected under an article].

We’ve started with a very general search here. [On screen the word **dementia** is typed into the search bar]. However, when you have a specific research topic, you will want to ensure your results list is focused and relevant, and also that it doesn't miss key articles. So you'll want to consider what you type into the search boxes.

Imagine your topic is, ‘Is physical activity in old age shown to delay dementia’. Here are some search tips:

Tip 1: Use the word AND to combine key concepts

So, as well as being interested in dementia, you want to know about physical activity and old age AND [on the left of the screen the **+Add search field** is selected. Add search fields which will be linked by AND [on screen **physical activity** is typed into the new search bar]. You can use AND to combine different concepts that you want to search together.

AND is useful to make your search more specific [on screen another AND search field is added with **old age** typed into the search bar]. This search brings back many fewer results than a general search on dementia.

Tip 2: Use quotation marks for an exact phrase.

[On screen the words **“physical activity”** and **“old age”** are now enclosed in double quotation marks]. This search will bring back far fewer more relevant results than if you use the words physical activity and old age without the quotation marks because it will only find articles where the two words appear as a phrase You can see the number of results has reduced from over 1400 to just over 200 with this small tweak.

Tip 3 Use the word OR to include additional terms

[On screen **OR alzheimer’s** is added after **dementia** in the search bar]. This will help expand your search. As you can see, our number of results has now increased to include articles written by academics who use different terminology, which you may be interested to read.

This video has shown you some basic tips for ensuring relevant results when searching databases.

For tips on accessing the full text of articles you find please view the next video in this series ‘Accessing full text’.

For more advanced database search tips, such as using filters, truncation, search strings and advanced search, please view the ‘Advanced’ video in this series.

You can find these on our YouTube channel: @CardiffUniLib. For further advice or queries, contact your subject librarian.